

Fresno Fresco

-By Tomás Tedesco

Cast of Characters

Laurance Ian: The incipient son. 18 years old. An artistic soul.

Lydia Ian: The insipid teenager. 16 years old. Always in her phone.

Monica Ian: The incidental mother. 40 years old. A lone survivor.

Setting

Some shitty town in California.

Time

Spring 2016, The Friday before high school graduation ceremony.

Act I

Scene 1

SETTING: The sibling's room. There are two bunk beds. Academic tidy girly life and a bohemian "Mac Gyver" world clash. Walls are covered with medals, awards and paintings the size of adult hands --arranged to create a mosaic effect. The floor is covered by a dirty cheap beige carpet. There is a tiny window with the size and shape of a plate.

AT RISE: Laurance is sitting in the floor, painting on a canvas that is lying in the middle of the room. He is facing the audience. Among his painting tools, there's a rustic knife. After a beat, Lydia enters. Lydia is ALWAYS on her phone, looking up and down.

Laurance: Hey sis'. How are you?

Lydia: Hi. Tired from the restaurant.

Laurance: Not as tired as mom.

Lydia: Definitely more tired than you, for good reasons.

Laurance: You need to relax more. *(Beat)* Woah, don't step on the fresco.

Lydia: What fresco...?

(Laurance stops her before she steps on it.)

Laurance: WAIT!

Lydia: Ohh dang! What the hell are you doing?

Laurance: I am preventing you tarnishing my work. What does it look like?

Lydia: It looks like you could be doing that somewhere else...

Laurance: ...it ain't happening inside this shoe box.

Lydia: True that. I don't understand how you manage to hang so much in this claustrophobic house. *(Beat)* It's nice, the size is kinda big for what you usually work with. Wouldn't it be cool if you drew some fences?

Laurance: No, because it is MY fresco. If we are gonna talk about “big sizes”, we should talk about your boyfriend.

Lydia: EX-boyfriend. It has the END at the end of boyfriEND.

Laurance: Geez, that was fast. And I wanted to have a little chat with the motherfucker for...

(Enter Monica, carrying college pamphlets.)

Laurance (CONT.):... cumming on my freaking “67th Moonlight”. I was about to sell it!!!

(Monica stops on her feet, unnoticed.)

Lydia: Maybe that proves that you should earn money in a more conventional way, huh?

Laurance: Maybe you two should have used his car, or the bathroom. Maybe he could have aimed at the moon, not at the freaking acrylic ocean! I wish we had bigger windows, or condoms hanging behind the door.

Lydia: That’s my business.

Laurance: It’s my room too, that makes us like business partners.

Lydia: Funny, you used the word “business” referring to yourself...

Monica *(stepping in)*: Maybe you are too young to be seeing guys.

Lydia: Ohh, hi mom. How are you? And who are you to talk, shotgun bride?

Monica: I was in college, you are in high school. It was different. No need to discuss it. You should apologize to your brother for, SCREWING his painting...

Laurance: Good one mom. You really know how to rub the dick in the wound.

Monica: Don’t be a brat.

(The siblings speak at the same time.)

Laurance (to Monica): Sorry.

Lydia (to Laurance): Sorry.

(BEAT, everybody sizes each other.)

Lydia: Sooo, mom... What's up with that pile of big bulky books and pamphlets? I know that I'm smart, but I don't want to go to college til' I graduate high school. That only leaves one suspect in this household...

(Lydia looks at Laurance.)

LYDIA (CONT.): Right, farthead?

Laurance: Mom, I told you I rather die than go to college. I mean, I hardly completed my high school requirements. What else do you want from me?

Monica: I want you to have a decent future.

(Laurance sits back by his work.)

Laurance: No, you want me to have your neglected past as my future. My future is my present, and my present is my art.

(Laurance grabs his knife, non-chantantly pokes a hole in his index finger and starts tracing red lines on the canvas.)

Monica: You will get tetanus one day.

Laurance *(absorbed)*: Blood on white virgin surfaces symbolizes a rite of passage. From nothing to something. Death feeds on life. Life becomes immortal on the canvas.

Shakespeare once said he could bestow immortality through his work. Man, I love sonnet fifty-five.

Lydia: Oh, great. He's gone inside his head again.

Laurance: I'm listening.

Monica: There are art schools.

Laurance: Yes, where they mass produce ideologies like IKEA furniture and where we waste time studying history instead of expressing ourselves. It's like some sort of brainwashing horror movie.

Lydia: Blablabla. Excuses for being a bum.

Laurance: Better a homeless person than a mindless slave.

Monica: Laurance, there IS value in education. By the way, have you thought of adding some fences to that fresco?

Laurance: I already told Lydia I wouldn't. We can't afford to pay for that "value" ... And even if we could, I wouldn't be interested.

Monica: So what are you gonna do? Because of deadlines, your only option is to apply at the local community college... Or, are you gonna start working?

Lydia: You could apply to my restaurant...

Laurance: Do they need signs, paintings, statues, gadgets???

Lydia: A chef.

Laurance: Fuckin' A!

Monica: So, college then?

Laurance: Here's an idea, why don't you two stop disregarding what I say?

Lydia: There's no need to be a drama queen. Besides, you are light-years away from being the perfect listener...

Laurance: Oh, so it's my fault now? Listen, I don't want to die on the inside before I fulfil my dreams! *(Beat)* And since we are on the subject, I might as well drop the bomb. This Fresco is my goodbye gift. I'm moving to Fresno. Where there are no fences...

Lydia: What the faaack?

Monica: Without my permission? I don't think so young man.

Laurance: Exactly, that's exactly why!

Monica: I don't get it. Not going to college is one thing, but leaving...

Laurance: What do you expect? I'm always being told that I'm useless and that the things I create don't matter. Nobody listens to what I say because I don't follow the rules. I don't

want to have a fence on my painting! I don't want to draw in small frames because, like you say "It takes up too much space." I'm leaving after the graduation ceremony, and I'm leaving this painting behind as a big FUCK YOU for all these years.

Lydia (*breaking the 4th wall*): Wow, shit just got real.

Monica: I used to wipe your ass, you know?

Laurance: In a way, you still do...

Monica: You little...

Laurance: I don't want to have it wiped for me anymore. One day, I will be successful and buy you a house in Santa Barbara, I know you always wanted one. One day...

Monica: I raised you, I broke my hands working for you two. How hard is for you to fulfil my dream?

Lydia: I'm gonna do the college route, so why push it into him as well? Even better, why don't YOU finish what you started? It's your dream after all.

Monica: Because I have mouths to feed and a job I'm committed to. Because memories of your father make it painful. Because I'm old and slower than I used to be.

Lydia: That's not true. You are not stupid. You raised two kids on your own and manage to survive. I KNOW you can do it. If you are thinking about father, fuck that man. You know what? Screw all men.

Laurance: Lydia, don't hate all men; YOU choose a parasite jack-ass for a boyfriend.

Lydia: Don't talk about Jake like that.

Monica: There are nice men out there.

Laurance: It just so happens that father and Jake aren't part of the packet. But there is truth in what you say mom, some of those guys you see during the weekends aren't complete tools.

Lydia (*Starting to cry at the phone*): He just texted me.

Monica: Ohh, sweetheart...

Laurance: Abusive son of a...

(Monica takes her phone away.)

Monica: Don't look at that stupid phone.

(Monica comforts Lydia.)

Laurance: I'm gonna find this guy. He cummed on my painting, he made my sister cry. Not a smart fellow.

(Laurance gives her a rag. Lydia blows her nose.)

Lydia *(runny nose)*: Thanks. I can't believe you are leaving.

Monica: We will see about that. I will keep your phone for now.

Lydia: NO, I won't have any friends.

Monica: Screens shouldn't be your only friends.

Lydia: I'm not always on the phone!

Laurance: Then, why do you get so defensive?

Monica: Quit it, you two little rascals. *(Beat)* Friends don't live inside phones. You should invite Jessica and Claire over. We could prepare a tea party after work tomorrow.

Lydia: Mom, I'm old.

Monica: I will make my special ginger cookies.

Lydia: Maybe not so old after all. Alright, give me my phone back and I will call them.

Monica: You need some air. Why don't you walk up to their houses and invite them personally? There is that perfect early evening breeze. The weather is just right for a walk.

Lydia: I guess so... Alright!

Laurance: Bye.

Monica: Don't forget your jacket. See you later sweetheart.

(Lydia exits.)

Laurance: I don't think she knows how to be by herself.

Monica: Few people her age do, but she will learn.

Laurance: I hope so.

(Pre-confrontational silence lingers in the air for a while.)

Monica: Let's cut to the chase, tell me your plan.

Laurance: Does that mean that you approve?

Monica: No, I want you to stay.

Laurance: I'm a parasite, you know that.

Monica: So?

Laurance: So I will leave. And I would love your approval while we are at it.

Monica: If I want you to stay, you can't expect me to let go of you overly-excited, do you?.

(Sigh) I wish you were leaving in better terms with us.

Laurance: Mom, I...

Monica: I want to help you as much as I can, for the last time.

Laurance: I need my space.

Monica: I can't stop you. Spit it out.

Laurance: Hmm, I'm gonna travel in the back of Billy's truck. Once I get there, he will introduce me to an art co-op. I can trade art for lodging.

Monica: Food?

Laurance: I will get a girlfriend, or learn how to cook.

Monica: You should photocopy my recipe book.

Laurance: I will copy it by hand. Clothes are packed, I just need to finish the fresco and put my tools away...

Monica: What about money?

Laurance: What about it?

Monica: Do you have some?

Laurance: Mmm, methinks I have 42 dollars.

(Monica takes out \$200, gives them to Laurance.)

Monica: Take this.

Laurance: Mom.

Monica: It's your graduation present, I wish you would stay with us.

Laurance: I won't.

Monica: You will take it; and you will leave. *(Beat)* Two weeks ago, I didn't fool myself like I did with your father. Luckily, the insomnia allowed me to work night hours. That's how I could get a little something for my child.

Laurance: You need it more than I do.

Monica: We will have one mouth less to feed.

(They hug, and keep talking embraced.)

Laurance: I'm afraid.

Monica: Good.

Laurance: I love the two of you with my life.

Monica: I know. We love you too.

(The hug breaks apart. Laurance goes back to his painting.)

Laurance: Thanks.

(Monica starts heading towards the door.)

Monica: Don't tell Lydia about the money. She always worries too much.

(Ultrasonic sound rings for five seconds. Monica collapses.)

Laurance: Mom?

(The actors voices go mute. Despair ambience music plays. Laurance helps Monica look up, who looks pale as a blank sheet of paper lost on a snow storm. He looks worried. He calls 911 using Lydia's phone. We hear sirens. We see confusion. The ultrasonic pitch rises for an instant. Red and blue light pass through the little window.)

Lights go dark.

FADE

Scene 2

(Saturday morning before dawn. The siblings room. The light has that greyish indistinct color, if it can be called a color, that marks the transition from the old day to the new day. A light from in between worlds. Laurance is talking to the audience.)

Laurance: Do you want to know what happened? I called 911. And then I had to clean the diarrhea off her ass. The doctors said that "The stress has been disrupting her digestive system for weeks." And so it came out. All that shit. All the evils of the world. And my hands were shoveling diarrhea into rags. And I threw up. On my clothes, on my fecal hands. Disgusting. I didn't clean myself up until the ambulance took her away. It was nasty. It was purgatory. I spent the whole night in the hospital. Today I learnt how parents love. It's not pleasant, it's very one-sided. But then again, there is always someone feeding someone. The natural cycle took me by surprise. It always does. I mean, she did it for me and Lydia everyday, on her own. She never abandoned us, not even when we learn to go to the potty in our own and the shit started coming out with the things we said. To love someone despite of how much shit surrounds them, that's love. Love is being that stronghold in the middle of the storm.

(A white canvas with abstract splashes of paint slowly descends from above and covers the back of the room. Laurance yawns. Light diminishes to the minimum. Fog travels across the floor and we enter Laurance's dreamscape.)

Laurance: Now, how do I deal with this?

(Surreal lights brighten at the center of the room, where Laurance is. The lights are become dimmer in direct relationship with their distance from the center of the room. In some spots, lights are non-existent. A main beam of light appears somewhere in the room, revealing Lydia.)

Lydia: I talked to the doctor.

Laurance: Is she doing better? They kicked me out...

Lydia: He said that if she gets some rest, she will be fine. He also said that you shouldn't threaten doctors.

Laurance: They didn't want to take her insurance. I had to get persuasive.

Lydia: Just don't do it again. We will be fine.

Laurance: Lydia. I will send you guys money monthly. And I...

(Laurance hesitates.)

Lydia: Yes?

Laurance: Take good care of her, of mom, and of yourself. You are the most precious people in the world to me.

Lydia: Are you okay?

Laurance: It should be normal for me to openly express the affective bonds that I have towards my sister and my mother.

Lydia: Well, it's kinda weird. There is this little concept called "History." It affects how people perceive you based on past actions.

Laurance: Yes, and I want history to move forward.

Lydia: I think I can be okay with that. (Beat) You look tired...

Laurance: I'm a tiny bitsy dixie sleepy deprived; by-product of growing up.

Lydia: Huh?

Laurance: I'm gonna go home and crush. Then finish the fresco. Can you hold the fort?

Lydia: I slept a few hours at Jessica's house.

Laurance: Good night.

Lydia: Good day.

(Darkness engulfs Lydia.)

Laurance: Something is off. Fuzzy memories. I feel like I'm forgetting something important.

If I only was a more "down-to-earth" person. RESET.

(A light beams on a different spot, revealing Lydia again.)

Lydia: They won't let me in to see her. That's bullshit.

Laurance: It's called visitor hours.

Lydia: It's creepy. Doctors won't say a word to me.

Laurance: I told them to be quiet.

Lydia: Why?

Laurance: Because I wanted to tell you in person. (Beat.) Lydia, I'm sorry, but mom is dead.

Lydia: What?

(The voices go silent. Clair de Lune introduces the melancholic grief, half-way through, it turns into a heavy metal riff. Lydia is crying, hugging, punching, screaming. Laurance tries to contain her. Laurance chooses to be a rock instead of a waterfall-barely keeping the tears inside. The frantic hug of aggression breaks apart, music ends and an exhausted calm reigns. We can hear their voices again.)

Laurance: Better now?

Lydia: I'm still angry...

Laurance: Of course.

Lydia: I'm so angry: At life for taking her. I hate myself for being powerless. And I despise you for not supporting her more before now. Before tragedy.

Laurance: Stop talking like you were the perfect daughter. How do you think I feel about it?! HUH? HUH! You aren't the only one in pain. I feel horrible. You have no idea how many times I thought tonight about...

(Laurance takes his knife out.)

Laurance (Cont.): digging thru these gutts.

Lydia: Ohh, great. Perfect. Running away is gonna solve all our problems. You fucking coward.

Laurance: No, but I'm sure as hell it's gonna take them away. Take me away. *(Beat)* Heh, women in this family must have some bad karma with pathetic men.

Lydia: That's bullshit. You are choosing to be pathetic.

Laurance: I have chosen to be useless, useless, useless. All of my life.

Lydia: You deserve to live.

Laurance: After all I have done.

Lydia: After all you HAVEN'T done. Yeah, you should stick around and suffer some more.

Laurance: True. But, if I stay, it will be your choice, not mine. My pride as an older brother, I...

Lydia: If you had any pride, you wouldn't be such a wimp.

Laurance: I don't know.

Lydia: You don't know whether to stab yourself or not. Geez, it must be so hard having so many fucking options Laurance. Look, I'm piss at you but you aren't god, okay? No human has that much responsibility over someone's life. So don't blame yourself.

Laurance: I still want to take this personally.

Lydia: WHY?

Laurance: Because...

Lydia: Look, I don't blame you, but I do. See the contradiction? People are full of them. So don't take yourself seriously. If you live long enough, your outlook will change.

Laurance: How can you be so strong?

Lydia: Because I'm weak.

(Beat. Laurance walks around.)

Lydia: And. If I was ever defeated by this weight, I would never get up.

Laurance *(Playing with his knife)*: Hmmmm. What to do, what to do. Stay or leave? I want to take care of you, although you seem more self-sufficient than I. On the other hand, bleeding sounds too tempting right now. Too easy. My skin itches. I want to let these red rivers of fresh blood rage down onto this boring landscape. This is my life. This boring sad place is my life.

Lydia: Please, don't do that. I need you.

Laurance: If I were to die, what would you do?

Lydia: I don't know, but I would cry for you. I care.

(Laurance faces audience and stops trying to control his emotions. A scream of rage. The point of the knife is aiming at his heart. His body is close to the posterior canvas. As his right hand flies towards his chest, seeking to end his life; the left hand stops it. The two arms of the one body fight each other. His breathing is hard. His effort, obvious. The sharp blade is an inch away from his chest.)

Laurance *(screams)*: She is dead! She isn't coming back!

(Knife falls to the floor. His left palm has been cut but he is okay otherwise. Some blood reaches the canvas.)

Laurance: I choose to live. *(Beat)* The price is pain.

Lydia: Wounds can close.

(He uses his right hand as a brush, his left one as a palette; and he starts drawing crimson lines in his left arm as he speaks.)

Laurance: The wounds of my mistakes will always be protruding. I can see it. My boiling blood pumping, my weak vessels trying to control it all. I will barf it onto canvases, into people's eyeballs. It will be my truest expression. A direct blood-soul transfusion. It is my curse and my blessing.

Lydia: It's okay. Give it time. We are gonna be okay.

(Laurance bends over and starts crying. His hands are covering his face.)

Lydia: Thank god. From now on, try keeping all this "blood thing" just as another extended metaphor.

(Lydia soothes him as he cries. Monica enters from behind the canvas.)

Monica: Son, it's time to wake up.

Lydia: She is right.

(Painful pause.)

Laurance: I know. I just don't want to leave now. You just got here.

Monica: I came to say farewell.

Laurance: What should I do now?

Monica: Don't sell yourself short. I will always be with you two.

(Music box lullaby plays. Laurance lays in the floor. Lydia pulls out the canvas from the wall, folds it into blanket size and gives it to Monica. Monica blankets his son for the last time and kisses him goodnight.)

FADE

We hear "I love you."

Scene 3

(Saturday noon. The sibling's room. Laurance is lying on the floor, covered by a blanket. His left arm is painted red. Lydia enters.)

Lydia: Hey, wake up farthead.

Laurance: What time is it?

Lydia: About twelve thirty.

Laurance: Shit, I felt asleep. *(Beat)* Did you find out?

Lydia: I just came back from the hospital. When I got here in the morning; you were passed out with blood in your arm, your lips were mumbling and you had tears in your eyes.

Something stank.

Laurance: Shit!

Lydia: It was like that movie, the Exorcist. I mean, it wasn't hard to connect the dots. I just had to find my phone on the floor, see that you called 911. Mom was missing... *(Beat)* I confirmed my gut feeling when I arrived at the hospital.

Laurance: I'm sorry you found out that way, I wanted to tell you personally. Thanks for the blanket...

Lydia: And for disinfecting your wound, and for cleaning up your tears. And for taking care of the cremation. Lame, lame, Laurance. Grieving knocked you out.

Laurance: I had a rough night. Wait, she is cremated already?

Lydia: I'm just kiddin'. *(Beat)* I saw the blood and I got scared. Scared that you had left me too.

Laurance: Sorry about that. I wasn't planning on it. But we need to leave...

Lydia: Did you try to...?

Laurance: Ohh, this?

(Laurance proudly displays his left, crimson arm.)

Laurance (Cont.): I swore an oath last night. I signed with my personal ink. I thought it was just a dream.

Lydia: It's funny. Reality can be really fragile sometimes. From now on, don't sleep with your knife on you. It worries me that your hands seem to have a will of their own.

Laurance: They do. But look what a beautiful pattern they have drawn. I don't even dare to take credit for it.

Lydia: Yeah, I guess it's kinda cool.

(Lydia looks worried.)

Laurance: Stop worrying about me and start worrying about yourself. How are you holding up?

Lydia: I'm okay. We ended up having a sleepover at Claire's place. Coming back here, visiting the hospital. That was kinda abrupt.

Laurance: It was abrupt.

Lydia: Yes, okay, it was! Please, can we please change the subject? I don't want to be thinking. Because if I do, I'm going to remember. And, remember, remembering is the last thing I want to do right now, okay? I have cried enough to end the drought already.

Laurance: I'm going to tell you a story, okay?

Lydia: Please.

Laurance: "This tale is only for grim grown-ups to know." Do you think you can handle it?

Lydia: After tonight, I can handle anything.

Laurance: Tough girl. Here it goes. "Once upon a time there was an older son in a poor family. He lived alone with his mother and little sister."

Lydia: Now I know why you draw instead of telling stories, this is just a basic Grimm's brothers template.

Laurance: Fuck you. Do you want to hear this or not?

Lydia: Go on.

Laurance: "The older brother didn't liked the life he was having, so he sought to escape and start a new life on his own. He was willing to put distance between himself and the only people he loved. He was ruthless. He was confused. But he wasn't stupid."

Lydia: I think I heard you say that lie before.

Laurance: Shhh. "Everybody in the family worked and contributed towards the rent. Except the older brother. He earned money and secretly saved it for his trip. The mother and the sister supported him unknowingly. He told himself that he was hiding his income because he was doing illegal stuff. He didn't want to worry them. But the truth was... The truth is that I'm a selfish son-of-a-male-bitch. The end."

Lydia: I hate you. Your words are more beautiful when you lie. The truth can be so ugly.

Laurance: That's why I'm going to change the truth.

Lydia: Mom is dead. We are alone. You can't change that. We imagined you were selling pot and God knows what else.

Laurance (*with secret agent voice*): If I told you about my secret network, I would have to kill you.

(Lydia giggles despite the situation.)

Lydia: I feel like killing you right now, so don't push it.

Laurance: I made you laugh, I won. Hehe.

Lydia: ENOUGH ALREADY. We cared for you, clumsy motherfucker!

(Lydia stops and gasps for a second, as she realizes that the implication of using the word "motherfucker" has changed for her.)

Lydia (CONT.): And this is how you repaid us? How you repaid her?

Laurance: I won't defend myself.

Lydia: You better not. Mom always said small families have to stick together no matter what. We kept feeding you because we didn't want you to get in trouble. When you started painting, Mom was relieved. She saw that as light, your light. Maybe, maybe you could straighten up after all. And then you decided to leave. We were devastated. SHE, I.

(Laurance cries.)

Laurance: I never knew.

Lydia: Don't cry. If you do, I will end up crying too. You know that.

Laurance: I take responsibility for my mistakes. I regret them too. I was trying my best. But that's a lame excuse. Here is a fact. We will stick together like we know and go forward.

Lydia: Forward? I have lost my compass in life. How can I know what direction to take?

Laurance: You don't have to. I will do it for you, for now. It's time for me to behave like the older brother I'm supposed to be. Let go of the hubris. You don't have to be the big sister anymore. Take a break.

Lydia: But. What's gonna happen to us? What are we gonna...?

Laurance: If you survive long enough, you will figure something out. I will give you that time. I will make miracles happen until you are ready to fly again on your own.

Lydia: I want you out of the fast life.

Laurance: When we go to Fresno, I will start clean.

Lydia: So this is still about your fucking dream?

Laurance: No, it's about convenience. Rent is cheaper over there. And there is no market for me in this dusty town. Look, you will be able to study full time, get good grades and eventually apply for a full scholarship. You won't need to work as much.

Lydia: Fuck you Laurance.

Laurance: Lydia, we. You lost too much. You need to get away, get perspective on things. We both do. This house is full of memories; and if we stay here, they will become ghouls and haunt us forever.

Lydia: You want me to erase my past.

Laurance: I want you to write your future. There will be no clarity here. Mom wants you to be happy.

Lydia: She isn't here.

Laurance: I work better under denial.

Lydia: Nothing lasts, important or superfluous. Puff. Gone. Like that. It's crazy.

Laurance: I know, but we are here now. For good or for bad. Lydia, it's my turn now. You have my permission to be a brat and cry. It's okay to be weak, I'm here for you, for as long as you need me.

(Lydia cries.)

Laurance: This is the part where we begin to write the story.

Lydia: Us versus the world.

Laurance: The world isn't against us. An angel is taking care of us from the other side.

FADE OUT

END